

VZCZCXRO8249

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DE RUEHIT #0873/01 2691252

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 261252Z SEP 07

FM AMCONSUL ISTANBUL

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7541

INFO RUEHZN/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000873

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SENSITIVE

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL TU

SUBJECT: U/S BURNS' MEETING WITH ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH

BARTHOLOMEW I

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I conveyed his appreciation for continued USG support and reiterated the concerns of the Patriarchate in a meeting with U/S Burns on September 18 in Istanbul. The Patriarch shared his optimism concerning the results of recent Turkish parliamentary and presidential elections while lamenting the GOT's unwillingness to engage in dialogue. He hoped to call on Prime Minister Erdogan and President Gul in October to congratulate them and express the concerns of the Patriarchate in person. U/S Burns assured Bartholomew of the USG's continued support and pledged to share the Ecumenical Patriarch's concerns during his September 19 meeting with the Prime Minister. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I expressed his appreciation to U/S Burns for Washington's continued support during a September 18 meeting in Istanbul. He emphasized USG support helped not only to ensure the continuation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's service to world-wide Orthodoxy but also to support Christian ideals throughout the world. Highlighting the Patriarchate's leadership role in advancing global concern for the environment, Bartholomew noted he had just returned from the Patriarchate's Seventh Symposium on the Environment in Greenland. U/S Burns underscored the respect and support the Ecumenical Patriarch receives from all branches of the USG and reassured Bartholomew that the Department leadership understands Patriarchate problems well and that this is the right time to resolve them.

¶3. (SBU) His All Holiness stated he was especially grateful to U/S Burns for reminding Turkish authorities of the need to re-open Halki Seminary in his September 13 Atlantic Council speech. U/S Burns assured Bartholomew that the U.S. will continue its strong support for the Patriarchate. He had raised the Halki issue during a January meeting with PM Erdogan in Ankara, stating he had been to the Seminary and that it was in Turkey's interest to re-open it. U/S Burns recounted that, at the time, the Prime Minister had shared his desire to do something about the issue. U/S Burns pledged to re-visit the issue during his September 19 meeting with PM Erdogan.

¶4. (SBU) Citing recent Turkish parliamentary and presidential elections, Bartholomew remarked he was happy with the results and that he had reason to be optimistic. He characterized PM Erdogan as a "courageous leader" who has a steadfast will to bring Turkey into the E.U. President Gul, His All Holiness noted, is well known internationally and has a good worldview. Bartholomew informed U/S Burns that he had asked for meetings with PM Erdogan, FM Babacan and President Gul and expected to visit Ankara in early October to congratulate the new administration and submit his

expectations regarding resolutions to Ecumenical Patriarchate grievances.

¶ 15. (SBU) Above all, Bartholomew confided, he wants the GOT to understand that the existence of the Patriarchate does not represent a threat to Turkey but rather, it is a blessing to have the center of world-wide Orthodoxy and its associated history tied to Turkish soil. Re-opening Halki Seminary and facilitating the election of future Patriarchs by allowing non-Turkish citizens to be eligible would be the best proof of religious freedom in Turkey, he said. U/S Burns agreed, noting the US interests in the concerns of the Patriarchate were tied to the US belief in religious freedom and that it was important for the United States to encourage Turkey to do more.

¶ 16. (SBU) Bartholomew particularly lamented the lack of dialogue with the GOT, stating he had sent over 30 letters to Turkish officials and had yet to receive a response. He emphasized that he did not want to give the impression that he was attempting to impose solutions through the U.S. and E.U. but that when he is asked about the problems of the Ecumenical Patriarchate he is obligated to respond honestly. He and his Patriarchate colleagues were among Turkey's most loyal citizens, he argued, pointing out that he had served two years in the Turkish military. Noting the portrait of Ataturk in the Patriarch's office, U/S Burns pledged to tell PM Erdogan that the Ecumenical Patriarchate is looking for dialogue without publicity as a partner with the government to find solutions to its problems.

¶ 17. (SBU) Asked what other messages U/S Burns could pass on to the GOT on behalf of the Patriarchate, Bartholomew responded that he wants to be received in Ankara next month and that he needs the government's help to resolve

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Patriarchate problems but that he is optimistic. He expressed concern for confiscated church properties, lack of juridical personality and the ecumenicity of the Patriarchate. Regarding the latter issue, Bartholomew asserted that contrary to some government official claims, he did recognize and appreciate that the GOT did not respond to the 2004 appointment of non-Turkish citizens to the Holy Synod; however, this was not enough, he stressed. U/S Burns promised to address these problems with the Prime Minister and re-assured the Patriarch of the USG's continued, though discrete, involvement.

¶ 18. (U) U/S Burns cleared this message.
WIENER